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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
Fourteenth session
30 March-16 April 1992

DRAFT REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, 1/ reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to forty-fifth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee 2/ and its recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182 (General Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50 and 45/76). At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Committee on Information and adopted its consensus resolutions as contained in General Assembly resolutions 46/73 A and B. The General Assembly further requested the Committee to report to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe were appointed; and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members of the Committee. The General Assembly also decided on the appointment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee on Information, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members and appointed Burkina Faso as a member of the Committee.

7. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belgium
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Belarus
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Cuba
Cyprus
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russian Federation
Singapore
Somalia
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe

II. ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

A. Opening of the session

8. The fourteenth session of the Committee was convened at United Nations Headquarters from 30 March to 16 April 1992. The Under-Secretary-General for Public Information made an introductory statement (see annex I).

B. Appointment of new members

9. The Committee welcomed the representative of Burkina Faso as a new member.

C. Election of officers

10. Upon the nomination of the representative of Hungary, the Committee elected by acclamation Mr. Aleksander Janowski (Poland), as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the unexpired term of office of the Bureau.

D. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

11. The Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Appointment of new members.
3. Election of officers.
4. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
5. Statement by the Chairman.
6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:
   (a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;
   (b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;

(c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.

7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

12. For the consideration of item 6 of the agenda, the Committee on Information had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991; 3/

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres in 1991: allocation of resources and host government assistance, submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 1 (j) and (k) of resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991; 4/

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of a system-wide information programme for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), submitted pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 3 of resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991. 5/

13. It was decided that a report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of furthering the development of communication infrastructures in developing countries, which was requested by the General Assembly in resolution 46/73 B, would be prepared after 1 January 1993, following the submission of additional observations and suggestions by Member States.

E. Statement by the Chairman

14. The Chairman addressed the Committee at its opening meeting (see annex II).

F. Observers

15. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Barbados, Bolivia, Botswana, Cameroon, Canada, Democratic Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Gabon, Haiti, Israel, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Namibia, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Sweden, Uganda and Zambia. The representatives of the Holy Sea and Switzerland also participated as observers.

16. Representatives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) attended.

17. In addition, representatives of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), the United Nations Correspondents' Association (UNCA), and the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) participated as observers.

G. Other business

18. The Committee on Information decided to conduct further informal consultations through the Bureau, the spokespersons of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China.

19. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Republic of Korea had requested to become a member of the Committee. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly the enlargement of its membership from 79 to 80 members and to submit the candidacy of the Republic of Korea to the General Assembly for approval (see para. ....., draft decision .....).

III. SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

A. General debate and consideration of substantive questions

20. Statements during the general debate were made by or on behalf of the following States members of the Committee: Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland (on behalf of the five Nordic countries), Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland (on behalf of the Group of Experts of the Group of Western European and other States), Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal (on behalf of the European Community and its member States), Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe. Statements were also made by the observers for: Gabon, Haiti and Senegal.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly,Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/36/21); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/39/21); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/40/21); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/41/21); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21; ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21; ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21).

Notes (continued)

3/ A/AC.198/1992/2.

4/ A/AC.198/1992/4.

5/ A/AC.198/1992/3.

Annex I

STATEMENT BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION AT THE OPENING MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

It is indeed a pleasure and privilege to welcome all of you on behalf of the Secretary-General to the fourteenth session of the Committee on Information. It is with great satisfaction that I also join you in welcoming the representative of Burkina Faso, this Committee's newest member.

As this is my first appearance before your Committee right after assuming my new functions earlier this month, please allow me to express my confidence that the Department of Public Information (DPI) will continue to benefit from your outstanding leadership and expertise, Mr. Chairman. The guidance and support of the members of the Bureau and the entire membership will be of particular significance as we enter perhaps the most challenging period of this Organization's history.

For our part, may I pledge to you DPI's full cooperation and commitment to offer any assistance you require to fulfil your vital mandate. I know that, working together, we can build a sound, focused and cohesive United Nations information strategy consistently geared to respond rapidly and effectively to evolving world events. Such a strategy will not only enhance public awareness of the full scope of this Organization's work but - I would venture to say - inspire a spirit of internationalism and active involvement on the part of the world community.

As we approach the turn of a new century and prepare to mark the fiftieth anniversary of this Organization, the world and the United Nations are poised on the threshold of a new era. Political, social and economic changes are sweeping the globe and the world literally has taken on a different face. New countries have emerged and the membership of this Organization has swelled to 175, as the peoples of the world increasingly exercise their right of self-determination and self-expression. The politics of confrontation are being replaced by a spirit of collaboration among nations and an awareness of the need, and even an eagerness, to pursue multilateral solutions to global problems have clearly emerged. The dynamics of this new climate of international relations have moved the United Nations to centre stage.

The breathtaking events of the recent past leave us searching for new grounding and fresh approaches to convey the message of a new United Nations in our continuing pursuit of a better standard of life in greater freedom for all. In these days, when change sometimes appears to be the only constant, much of humankind has begun to look upon the United Nations as the most potent catalyst in the prevention of conflict in the quest for peace as well as in the pursuit of international development and the eradication of human misery. To remain relevant, the United Nations must do more than keep abreast of the

times. I daresay, this Organization has a crucial responsibility in forming that reality through its multitude of work programmes and activities and - of critical importance to this Committee and the Department - through its information programmes.

We are today presented with a rare opportunity to rise to the expectations of peoples of all nations and to quench their thirst for knowledge about what the United Nations does and how, in this decade, this Organization can influence the design and direction of global events both now and into the next century. Our task is not an easy one and high hopes and expectations are often mixed blessings; for, while we know that the rewards of our success could be enormous, we must also be mindful that the Organization's credibility may well be resting on the delicate balance of public opinion around the world.

I would submit to you today that the United Nations can be truly effective - and indeed live up to the vision of the founding nations expressed in its Charter - only with the full support not only of its member Governments but also of the "peoples of the United Nations". We must do our best to reach into every town and village, almost to every household, to earn the trust and support so central to the formation of public consent, the cornerstone of an effective United Nations. We must strive to instil the awareness that the United Nations is good value for the dollar; certainly a more cost-effective and humane solution to the conflict and human suffering which tragically could occur if nations did not have an open forum and a mechanism through which to handle their problems and mutual concerns.

This requires the closest possible cooperation with the media worldwide, with non-governmental organizations and with other redisseminators of information, for information is the sinew that binds public consent. So much good work is accomplished by this Organization; so many goals set by the world community are met; so many causes are advanced. It is our job to make sure that these achievements are brought to public awareness and that we do all within our power to nurture the renascent faith and interest in the United Nations so that the rising expectation for solving important future issues can translate into action.

Just as political, social and economic changes are sweeping the world, the winds of change are blowing across this Organization. In a dynamic and decisive manner, the Secretary-General has introduced administrative and structural changes to revitalize internal Secretariat operations, instil flexibility and direct the United Nations to fulfil its multifaceted and evolving role as the primary mechanism for conducting the world's business.

DPI, which has only recently undergone a major restructuring under the leadership of my distinguished predecessor, Madame Thérèse Paquet-Sévigny, will at present largely retain its current organizational form. Measures to enhance the role of DPI have, however, already been taken with the transfer to the Department of the responsibility for and the staffing resources of the secretariat of the interdepartmental Publications Board as well as a part of the News Distribution Service of the former Office for Research and the

Collection of Information. Moreover, in a continuing effort to streamline operations and promote the cost-effective management of the limited resources at our disposal, DPI has been mandated by the Secretary-General to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the integration of a number of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices. In this connection, I wish to assure you that the information components affected will retain strong information programmes, and that the integration will be effected primarily in terms of achieving a more efficient use of available staffing and operational facilities and resources.

Another important development is that, having in mind the interest expressed by the respective Governments and as a practical means of ensuring an effective United Nations in a changing world, the Secretary-General has decided to establish United Nations Interim Offices in some Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States along the same lines of the integrated approach towards development and information activities.

Against this tableau, we in DPI are aggressively evaluating and rethinking the way in which we plan and act - as well as react - to the rapid-fire developments and succession of events and activities of the Organization. We know that we must remain flexible - even fluid - in the deployment of our limited resources to match our actions to the priorities of our work programmes. We are mindful that we must engage in a dynamic interaction with the public, connecting with people of every walk of life - through the audio and visual media and press, through publications and informational brochures, and grass-roots interaction at all levels. We must capitalize on recent successes and strengthen our links with the media, serving as the "window to the world" for viewers, listeners and readers all over on the Organization's myriad of activities. In fact, work is already progressing in this regard and, on a typical day, one can hear on the radio, watch on television, or read in a newspaper at least one story on United Nations involvement in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas.

There is much to do and we shall turn to this expert body for both guidance and support as we introduce new methods and fresh ideas in our mission to shape a strong public interest and confidence in the role of this Organization as a catalyst in accelerating the positive developments which have already occurred; for example, through technical programmes for development in African and other developing countries as well as campaigns for the elimination of apartheid, advance alert systems for the prevention of conflict, the making and preservation of peace and security and the spread of democracy throughout the world. We shall seek to play a pivotal role in highlighting efforts to confront the dangers facing the modern world. To name just a few: North-South economic and social issues which grow ever more dramatic; the threats to our environment; the promotion of and respect for human rights; and the elimination of the suffering which confronts humanity in far too many parts of the world. We shall also focus attention on preparations to mark the Organization's fiftieth anniversary, seizing yet another opportunity to shine the spotlight on the history and achievements of

this institution, founded on the visions and hopes of "we the peoples" following the darkest moment of modern civilization.

An important aspect of our strategy will be to target carefully our intended readerships, listeners and other audiences in order to improve the channels of communication. However universal our message may be, more than ever before we have to address more efficiently a diversity of audiences. This requires a more systematic evaluation of the Department's information material both with regard to cost-effectiveness and accessibility.

In exploiting the universal power of a stronger United Nations in trying to bring together all the peoples of the world, the Department must avail itself of new information technologies to communicate and convince in a manner which peoples can take to heart. Our interconnected and interdependent world is a reality that the Department must take into account in adapting to the requirements of nations and people as they interact and exchange data and ideas. Modern technologies and the existing web of electronic networks have become essential to rally public opinion in pursuit of common goals. DPI shall seek every opportunity available - given its financial and other limitations - to use them. The summit level meeting of the Security Council is a prime example of how, working with and capitalizing on the interest of our counterparts in the news media, we can involve the public in the activities of this Organization and use modern information technology as an instrument to serve the cause of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

Having shared with you my thoughts on the direction and forms that our public information programme can take, I should now like to take this opportunity to elaborate in some detail on the work of the Department of Public Information during the inter-sessional period.

As you well know, DPI activities can largely be characterized as directed in purpose and audience, while broad in approach and subject-matter treated, and multi-media in its form of dissemination. The target audience can be as expert and experienced as world-class journalists or as new to the Organization as elementary schoolchildren. Many of our efforts are expended precisely in targeting the audience or readership and tailoring our multi-media information products not only to reach them physically, but to reach them with materials that will have an impact on how they view the United Nations and the world around them. To enhance the value of our work to the public, we have - so to say - reinvested the data gained through readership surveys or public opinion polls into new projects as we develop them.

Our approach can therefore be characterized as both audience-directed and programme-driven. We begin with the identification of the target audiences - that is, how we have been able over the past years to define that somewhat elusive term "public" in the name of our Department - then concentrate on informing the "public" on specific programmes set for us by the General Assembly. We organize seminars and meetings for experts and non-governmental

organizations, produce books, films, videos, television and radio programmes, ensure their effective distribution and, finally, evaluate their impact and usefulness as information products.

To begin with the definition of our "public", I would recall that we essentially service two types of audiences: firstly, the news media to whom we provide largely "raw materials" which they use in their own programming; and, secondly, defined readerships, listeners or viewers to whom we deliver directly finished information products.

Our work with the news media has for the past couple of years taken on a new dimension as the United Nations has become a "hot" news item, with television and radio news broadcasters anxious to gain access to United Nations events and news. Press releases and briefings have become a staple of life and the Department has established - and will continue to seek - an active interaction with the media and will pursue every opportunity to utilize their interest to promote an informed and positive image of the Organization.

Here I would also recall my earlier reference to the decision of the Secretary-General to incorporate the News Distribution Service within the Office of the Spokesperson/Executive Media Service. Thus strengthened, the Division now has the responsibility to monitor, on the basis of a wide spectrum of media sources, and provide the Secretary-General and senior officials with commentaries on the work of the Organization in the media across the globe.

Media perceptions, as discerned through a review of the editorial comments of opinion-makers, will be gathered by field information offices throughout the world for analysis and appropriate reaction. Through this system, we anticipate that the Organization will be better able to counter misperceptions and erroneous statements almost as quickly as they appear, thereby enhancing our ability to form positive public opinion.

As you are aware, the Organization has also devoted considerable attention to peacemaking and peace-keeping operations in the recent past. In this connection, I should observe that the Office of the Spokesperson has evolved into a veritable training ground for spokespersons assigned to peace-keeping operations, the latest example being the recent appointment of two senior DPI staff members as spokespersons for the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia - led, by the way, by another of my distinguished precedessors, Mr. Yasushi Akashi.

The sharp increase in the number and broadened scope of peacemaking and peace-keeping activities over the past couple of years - since April 1991, six new operations have been launched - have made new and exacting demands on the Department. Worldwide public interest and the increasingly central role of information activities to fulfilling the mandate of the mission itself in the area of the operations have required that DPI not only train spokespersons to work in the field but also formulate and implement information programmes tailored to each endeavour.

The role of DPI in these political missions has become so important that I would like to take this opportunity to brief the Committee on how we develop these information components. In order to strengthen our effectiveness, the Department has initiated a set of guidelines on measures to meet the dual mandate of a comprehensive information programme for a peace-keeping or other politically sensitive endeavour. On the one hand, the Department elaborates a detailed explanation of the role of the United Nations in connection with the mission for a target audience including the media, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, research institutions and the public at large.

On the other hand, recognizing that the successful implementation of the Organization's mandate may well be facilitated by public information activities specifically designed for the mission location, DPI carries out specific local projects, such as educational campaigns on human rights, which are relative to the tasks at hand and serve to further related United Nations work. In consultation with the substantive office concerned, all these activities are proposed as comprehensive information campaigns for the specific mission concerned. Examples of recent projects include the information campaigns employed or in progress for the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, and proposals designed in support of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission, the United Nations Angola Verification Mission, the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia and the United Nations Technical Mission to Somalia; in short, all the major political missions undertaken or planned within the past few months.

Although the immediacy of news broadcasts on fast-breaking developments has kept the United Nations at the forefront of public consciousness, DPI has continued to design information campaigns and create products to reach directly to target audiences. These outreach programmes have involved virtually all aspects of the Department's work; from publishing materials and creating posters, to conducting briefings and guided tours, to producing films, videos and radio programmes for broadcast in all parts of the world. Developed along the programmatic lines directed by the General Assembly through this Committee, these programmes treat not only the headline United Nations news items, they are also intended to keep the world thinking about the plethora of issues on the international agenda.

In compliance with the mandates of the General Assembly, public information campaigns have focused on such salient aspects of the Organization's programmes as the environment, social development and humanitarian affairs, the fight against apartheid, the rights of the Palestinian people and African development activities. With your permission, Sir, I should like briefly to describe some of the specific endeavours we have undertaken in these fields of interest.

As you are all aware, in Rio de Janeiro in June of this year, the United Nations will convene a Conference on Environment and Development: the Earth Summit. DPI has devoted considerable effort to cultivate and inform the media on the issues on the Conference agenda. I am pleased to note that the

response has been phenomenal. Some 40 to 50 questions per day from the media are already being handled and links have been established with important international media. To name just a few: CNN, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, Antenne 2, Channel 13 Chile, Time and Newsweek will produce stories or supplements featuring the event. As of 24 March, the Department has accredited 1,635 journalists for UNCED - well ahead of the Conference itself. The Department will make available to broadcasters its own series of radio features just prior to and during the Conference and it has already produced a number of television magazine programmes on a variety of Conference-related issues - including 12 entitled The UN in Action.

To convey to you the magnitude of the distribution network, I should tell you that the Department has disseminated more than 120,000 copies in English and tens of thousands in six other language versions of its brochure on UNCED. Additional thousands of copies of 11 backgrounders in the Earth Summit series have likewise been distributed. Naturally, these activities will intensify as the time of the Conference approaches, culminating with full coverage of the event from the Conference site. I would note that this Committee is scheduled to discuss further the comprehensive information programme developed for the Conference in the context of its consideration of the Secretary-General's report set out in document A/AC.198/1992/3.

In addition to UNCED, DPI has also been promoting other major United Nations events. The recently concluded eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development received a good amount of press attention all over the world. The Department has accredited some 250 journalists, and provided coverage in English, French and Spanish. At present, plans are being formulated for public information programmes in support of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. In this connection, the Department recently published an illustrated book entitled Women: Challenges to the Year 2000, with a companion poster and brochure, outlining further action that must be taken to improve the daily lives of women throughout the world.

DPI has pursued the fulfilment of its mandate to further the understanding of various aspects of the question of Palestine and to promote the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination through the conduct of a successful journalists' tour to the area, a series of national media encounters and the International Encounter for European Journalists held at Helsinki in June 1991. Further national and regional journalist encounters are planned for this year, including the first of the series scheduled for May. Publishing activities include, among others, the planned issuance of such booklets as one summarizing the outcome of the Helsinki Encounter and an updated edition of a booklet on the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

I should also like to reflect on another very important area of public information activities - our work in support of the fight against apartheid. Working closely with our colleagues in the Centre Against Apartheid, we have

continued to create information products - such as the travelling exhibit on apartheid - which we believe are heightening public consciousness at this crucial time. The historic referendum in South Africa just over a week ago serves as a poignant reminder of the astounding changes in our world and the galvanizing impact of public opinion. Our efforts will be designed to keep this issue squarely in the public consciousness and, indeed, conscience.

Strengthened by the mandate conveyed in General Assembly resolution 46/151, the Department accords priority attention to building international awareness of Africa's severe economic crisis. Activities include the continued publication of the periodical Africa Recovery and Briefing Papers on issues of special concern to Africa, such as: environment and development; African priorities for action; regional integration; foreign direct investment; Africa's debt crisis; economic diversification; as well as food security and self-sufficiency. Resources permitting, an international media tour will be organized to two countries, to enable journalists to experience first-hand the difficult and far-reaching action African Governments are undertaking to revive their economies.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I have just reviewed the various aspects of DPI's collaboration with the major communications media and the way in which the Department is carrying out the various information activities entrusted to it by the General Assembly. The seminars, briefings, meetings, publications, films, video and radio programmes are different ways of giving expression to this overall strategy. Aimed at specific target groups, these activities seek to speak for the United Nations and explain the objectives the Organization intends to pursue and the principles it intends to follow, so that our priority objectives better understood. We can indeed be satisfied at what we have achieved in this area thus far. Yet there is still room for improvement, particularly in using our limited resources more effectively.

A good example is the Yearbook of the United Nations, which is experiencing major delays in publication. I should like to recall in this connection that at its most recent session, the General Assembly had supported the Department's efforts to eliminate the backlog and to restore the Yearbook's normal schedule of annual publication.

In accordance with this Committee's guidelines, which were endorsed by the General Assembly, the Department concluded a number of agreements with an external publisher in order to speed up the publication of the 1988, 1989 and 1990 editions of the UN Yearbook as well as the current 1991 edition. I should also like to inform you that the 1987 edition was submitted on schedule in December 1991 and that it is currently in publication.

Other major efforts in this area concern the publication of an expanded version of the World Media Handbook, which is scheduled to appear in mid-1992. I am happy to inform you in this connection that the first edition of this publication, which appeared in 1990, was selected by the American

Library Association for inclusion in its list of major documents, and that it is particularly valued for its full coverage of developing countries, about which, and I quote, "it is difficult to obtain media data". The Handbook, which seeks to promote better understanding of journalistic circles throughout the world, is also used as a reference tool by professionals both inside and outside the United Nations.

Audio-visual products are another important means of reaching the public at large. During the past year, the Department has continued to market and disseminate its audio-visual products around the world, often in collaboration with other United Nations agencies. DPI has also participated with certain specialized agencies in several international film festivals, video fairs and conferences. These events have provided an occasion for making new contacts with professional circles so that new co-productions can be undertaken.

I am pleased to inform you that several of our videos and films have won awards during the past year. The film "Break Down the Barriers" won first prize at the Superfest festival in June of last year. Our video production "Brushstrokes" was declared the best children's film at the Festival of the American Society of Independent Film Animators in January of last year, while "Our Planet Earth", another video production, won the Grand Prize at last year's Ekofilm Festival.

Mr. Chairman,

Mindful that the timeliness of information can well define its usefulness, the Department has been making every effort to ensure timely dissemination of its materials to end-users throughout the world. Over the past year, almost 1.5 million copies of publications and United Nations parliamentary documents have been distributed, in addition to statements and messages by the Secretary-General, press releases, backgrounders and other materials.

The application of technological innovations represents a very important element of the departmental distribution strategy. DPI has been developing a computerized contact and mailing list programme for local use by the United Nations information centres in establishing and maintaining their own databases. In turn, these databases can be used to supply the Department with mailing list data for the central development of an up-to-date global directory of recipients interested in particular subjects. This integrated system is expected to enhance further the Department's ability to target and reach the audiences for each of its products.

Other noteworthy developments in our dissemination programme include the conclusion of a new contract with the Reuters news agency that provides, inter alia, for the direct distribution of United Nations press releases through Reuters' services. Moreover, in cooperation with the Global Education Motivators (GEMNET), DPI is working to expand the system of on-line public access to United Nations information services.

The importance of local access to United Nations information has been recognized since the earliest days in the life of this Organization. Over the years, a network of 67 information centres and services has been established throughout the world, enabling vital sectors of society to establish immediate contact with United Nations staff skilled in communications and versed in the Organization's activities. In many instances, the news and information products developed by the Department reach their intended audience precisely through the field information network. The centres, moreover, co-produce with networks both radio and television broadcasts and publish on their own newsletters and press releases in local languages.

The centres are instrumental in promoting United Nations observances such as United Nations Day, International Women's Day, Human Rights Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. They contribute to the preparations for and the promotion of United Nations conferences, such as UNCED, and help stimulate national and regional support.

Regional meetings of centre personnel, special briefing programmes for local staff, computer training for some 100 staff of 35 centres and improvements in electronic communications and computerization have been undertaken to strengthen the effectiveness of the centres. During the current biennium, it is planned to complete the computerization of most of the information centres.

I would note at this juncture that the Committee on Information is scheduled to consider at its current session the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres, including details on the allocation of resources for each Centre as well as host government assistance, where provided. The document has been circulated under the symbol A/AC.198/1992/4. DPI will be happy to provide further information when the Committee considers this report.

Another element in our direct public information and dissemination campaign involves the important and constructive role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in furthering the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The number of NGOs associated with DPI is at present 1,300; nearly double the number of just four years ago. The NGO Resource Centre, located on the ground floor of the Secretariat, serves the information and accreditation needs of hundreds of NGO representatives and conducts distribution of United Nations information materials to all DPI-associated NGOs throughout the world. The active interest of NGOs is strongly evident in their attendance at the DPI weekly NGO briefings - which attract an audience of between 160 and 400 participants - and their involvement in the 1991 DPI/NGO Conference held in September 1991, where some 1,200 representatives of 445 NGOs from 51 Member States were registered. The 1991 Conference, on the topic "Peace, justice and development: Ingredients for an Emerging World Order" was the largest NGO gathering ever organized by the Department and serves as a good indicator of just how relevant the work of the United Nations has become to all sectors of society.

Mr. Chairman,

I have described in some detail the work carried out in DPI over the past year. But, a very important element in implementing an effective public information or relations campaign must involve an evaluation of these activities.

In order to assess public opinion trends, the Department has continued polling the public about the Organization. From the results gathered, there is ample evidence that the United Nations is highly valued worldwide and that interest in all dimensions of the Organization's activities runs very high in all the countries surveyed.

In pursuance of the mandate of the Department, these studies serve a valuable managerial purpose and enable the Department to react and adjust its information strategies to reflect world developments and meet the public's expectations of the Organization. We intended to use these data to gain a vital perspective on the ways to secure the public consent I referred to in the opening of this statement to serve better the information programme directives and guidelines set by this Committee.

The effectiveness and timeliness of information products are very often functions of the provision of adequate resources and the sound management of these means. Essential elements in this equation are the necessity to reflect information activities in the basic framework of programmatic endeavours, to earmark sufficient resources for the Department of Public Information to carry out its work and to deploy these resources with flexibility to respond to changing conditions and priorities.

I might pause at this point, Mr. Chairman, to emphasize what we have all come to understand as the limitations of the biennial programme budgeting process when we are confronted with extraordinary and unpredictable demands for services. In this respect, DPI is no different from other departments involved in the planning and conduct of unforeseeable missions. With a full programme of mandated activities, as well as additional priority tasks that have been assigned to DPI which were not foreseen initially at the time of the preparation of the 1992-1993 programme budget, DPI is already adjusting and adopting a flexible approach to the deployment of its limited resources.

But, elasticity can stretch just so far and I would be remiss in my duties if I did not signal to you today that the capacity for absorption is on the brink of exhaustion. As and when that point is reached, our ability to live up to all these expectations could be placed in jeopardy. If we are to continue to do a serious job, one that we can truly be proud of, and deliver all the information services and products requested by us, we shall - as in the past - turn to you, the Member States, for the support needed - both in concrete financial as well as in spiritual terms - to enable us to rise to your expectations and those of the world community.

In this regard, we have an extremely valuable resource in our cooperation with other agencies and programmes in the United Nations system. In anticipation of your discussion of the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), circulated as document A/AC.198/1992/2, I should highlight the more important joint activities undertaken in the past year.

In September 1991, DPI participated in the International Forum on Culture and Democracy held in Prague. The event was jointly organized by UNESCO and the Government of Czechoslovakia. On that occasion, the Department delivered a message on behalf of the Secretary-General and offered a presentation on the globalization of information and democracy.

In October 1991, DPI organized the second annual Inter-Agency Information Fair, which attracted 25 participating organizations. The two-week event provided a much-welcomed opportunity for the agency representatives to be in direct contact with the public, to disseminate their materials and to share their views and experiences.

And, this April, DPI will be coordinating the participation of seven United Nations agencies at the MIP Cannes Television Festival, the largest market in the world for video programmes.

Permit me, Mr. Chairman, to offer a few words about the cooperation between DPI and UNESCO. As explained in the last report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on "Questions relating to information", joint DPI/UNESCO activities aim at essentially two objectives: firstly, improving the information and communication infrastructure of developing countries; and, secondly, promoting freedom of the press as a vital element in development and democratization.

A vivid example of this cooperation was the 1991 seminar held in Windhoek, Namibia - in which UNDP also participated - to promote an independent and pluralistic African press. The recommendations adopted at this seminar, relating to the improvement of the information and communication infrastructure of the African countries, are now being implemented by UNESCO through its International Programme for the Development of Communication.

In the context of the activities of DPI over the past year, I have referred to the reports submitted to this session of the Committee on Information in compliance with General Assembly resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991. To summarize, the Committee will be considering three separate reports: document A/AC.198/1992/2 on the activities of the JUNIC; document A/AC.198/1992/3 before you on the implementation of a system-wide information programme for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); and document A/AC.198/1992/4, providing the information requested in paragraph 1 (j) of the resolution on the allocation of resources to information centres, including host government assistance where such is provided. I take this opportunity to reiterate that the Department stands ready to provide you with any additional information you may require in your deliberations.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished representatives,

It goes without saying that, in today's increasingly interdependent world, communication is essential to the promotion of a better understanding among nations in the pursuit of multilateral collaboration for the benefit of all humankind. In a global environment characterized by a growing spirit of cooperation, the United Nations can - and should - play a pivotal role in bringing together the peoples of the world and fostering the advancement of universal human values. The ability of the United Nations to communicate its message of preserving peace, advocating social and economic development, and improving the quality of life for all has become more important than ever before. The challenges the Department faces in fulfilling its mission cannot be overemphasized nor should they be oversimplified.

In the discharge of its mandate, this Committee is in a unique position to play an essential role in guiding the Department of Public Information in the conduct of its work. Our success begins with you. For it will have its foundation in your understanding, support and guidance and will be built through the creative efforts and talents of the dedicated staff of DPI throughout the world. As you prepare to tackle the complex issues of your agenda, I wish you a fruitful session and again assure you of our steadfast commitment to do all within our power to assist you in your work and to attain the goals you set for us.

Annex II

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AT THE OPENING OF ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION

Let me take this opportunity to share a few preliminary ideas which, I feel, may facilitate our work during this session.

During the past two years, we have succeeded in working within a framework of consensus, and I believe that it is the intention of all members of the Committee that this process continue.

Nevertheless, I feel that this year we must introduce certain changes which, while pertaining to form, affect substantive matters and will allow us to take into account the changes and new dynamic in international relations and this Organization.

Distinguished delegates, we all agree on the basic principles which are contained in the mandate given to the Department of Public Information and, by extension, to the General Assembly. It is therefore my intention that our point of departure this year should not be, as it has been the case on previous occasions, the resolutions adopted in 1991. It seems more appropriate to me that, rather than add new elements and expand last year's list, we should endeavour to focus our efforts on a small core of issues which are directly related to the most important items and have to do with the overall management of the Department - topics to which we would hope that the Department of Public Information might devote special attention while continuing to carry out its original mandates.

I would therefore suggest that this year, instead of undertaking a paragraph-by-paragraph revision of recommendations adopted in 1991 and on which consensus exists, we should take a new, more concrete approach. Thus we would have an initial paragraph that would be limited to noting or reaffirming General Assembly resolution 46/73, leaving it to the Committee to find the most appropriate wording. We would then formulate a limited number of recommendations setting out our priorities. In this connection, it is important that we devote special attention this year to the informal seminars that are being held today, tomorrow - Tuesday - and Wednesday, since it is from these workshops that the priority areas will come.

Distinguished delegates, one issue to which special attention should be paid this year is the information centres. Here I would draw your attention to paragraph 14 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/AC.198/1992/4, which states that the Secretary-General intends to identify "further means of integrating information components at a number of duty stations where UNDP maintains a strong representation with the purpose of minimizing operational costs while supporting and enhancing the information function". In so far as this new process is concerned, we are clearly in a transitional period, since the Secretary-General has not yet formalized his

proposal and quite probably will not be in a position to do so during the current session. Bearing this in mind, I believe that the Committee should refrain this year from suggesting courses of action on this matter pending the appearance of the Secretary-General's report.

I should like, however, to emphasize the Committee's position on this subject, which is that, whatever solution is proposed, it is imperative that the centres' existing information function should not be reduced. To this end, I should like to refer once again to paragraph 14 of document A/AC.198/1992/4, in which the Secretary-General states that the purpose of the new process is "supporting and enhancing the information function".

Accordingly, any proposal put forward must take financial implications into account and fully uphold the mandate and function of the centres.

With regard to the Committee's methods of work, I suggest that this year the Bureau, together with the Chairman of the regional groups and China, should continue their work and, if necessary, a working group should be convened.

In mentioning the Bureau, I should like to express my gratitude to the three Vice-Chairmen and to the Rapporteur for the excellent work that they have done in my absence, and in particular to my friend Mr. Suhail, who conducted the informal meetings with the utmost efficiency.